

Ants in the lawn, ants in the house

Ants are social little insects that generally play a useful role in nature and whose presence is not necessarily problematic. Since there are many trees in Rosemère, ants are quite present and active here for much of the season.

On your grass, they can cause a few problems as they tend to build small nests here and there throughout the lawn. On the other hand, they aerate the soil by excavating galleries, clean away small debris and effectively prey on a number of garden pests, including white grubs. While we should learn to appreciate and tolerate them, there are a few things we can do to make our lawn a bit less attractive to them:

- The regular use of vegetal compost enhances the moisture and organic matter in the soil; it's a good way of enriching the lawn and disrupting the work of ants.
- Spreading a thin layer of black earth on sandy soil will reduce the proportion of sand, making it harder for ants to build their tunnels.



Carpenter ants tend to be more worrisome though they are rarely a source of major problems. Carpenter ants build their nest in damp or rotting wood, tunnelling deeply. They are often visible near old tree stumps, fences with rotting wood or close to cords of wood. These ants are quite active; they forage for food wherever they can find it, which is why they visit our houses every spring. If they happen to come across damp wood while visiting, chances are they could settle in.

The best way to avoid this situation is to watch for the infiltration of water (window sills, basements, roof...) and to replace any wood that remains damp. As a rule, ants do not attack sound wood, but they will make the most of pre-existing problems. Although they tend to be more active at night, some clues could point to the presence of an ant colony in your home:

- Presence of tiny piles of sawdust in the house.
- Ants active in the house during winter, particularly if they are winged.

To get rid of a colony of carpenter ants, you have to find the main nest and destroy it. Unfortunately, it is not always easy to locate. In some cases, it is outside the house while satellite nests are indoors. If the nest found inside is easily accessible, simply use a vacuum cleaner (don't forget to empty the bag afterwards, and leave it outside...) or boiling water to kill the ants.

A number of so-called "low impact" products can be used if you have ants in the house. Borax-based products (approximately 5% concentration) are used as bait to kill the colony. Foraging ants contaminate the queen by sharing the poisoned food in their second stomach with the rest of the colony through a process known as trophallaxis. To eliminate outdoor nests, you can install an ant trap at each corner of the house, adding a borax-based product (ex.: "Attack" by Safer's) as bait. Simply pour the sweet borax mix in aluminium plates or in a trap designed for this purpose ("Ant Pro"), which can be ordered online from www.natural-insect-control.com. However, the mix must be renewed daily, as it tends to dry out and must remain liquid, if the ants are to drink it.

You can also sprinkle diatomaceous earth (“Insectigone” by Chemfree) where ants are likely to enter or pass. The silica naturally contained in this powder acts mechanically by scratching the cuticles of the ants’ legs, causing dehydration and, ultimately, their death. Sold in most good hardware stores or garden centres, these products must be used as directed, and though they are low impact, they should be kept out of the reach of children and pets.

Still, it is important to remember that ants can be useful when they are outside, and the excessive use of diatomaceous earth could prove harmful to other useful insects living in your garden, including the invaluable pollinators.

Whether you are dealing with ants in your lawn or carpenter ants, you must prevent them from entering your home, where they are not welcome. Consequently, you would do well to search for, and seal cracks and holes through which they can enter, to avoid the problem in the first place. In addition, discard aphid-infested houseplants and clean food crumbs from your cupboards, as these could attract them.

Beware of the “good” exterminator who returns every year... If he’s back, it’s because your problem hasn’t been settled! In fact, resorting to the services of an exterminator who uses pesticides is only justified if a colony has settled inside the frame of your home. A conscientious company will also seek a way to keep the ants from entering the house, offering to caulk doors and windows and proposing various methods to seal the different openings.

Resorting to an insect specialist such as an entomologist can often prove to be a better long-term approach. On the other hand, if you must call in an exterminator who uses pesticides, remember that he cannot use them outside the house, unless you have obtained a temporary permit from the Town’s Public Works Department.

For additional information, contact the Town’s eco-consultant, at 450 621-3500, ext. 3305.

For additional information:

-Boucher Stéphanie, 2006. *Les insectes de nos jardins*. Éditions Broquet, St-Constant, Qc. 208 pages.

-Lévesque Micheline, 2005. *Le guide complet des pesticides à faible impact et autres solutions naturelles*. Isabelle Quentin Éditeur, Ville Lasalle, Qc. 214 pages.

-Very complete website of the Montréal Insectarium:

www2.ville.montreal.qc.ca/insectarium/toile/nouveau/menu.php?s=info&p=fich

-Website of the Canadian Pest Management Regulatory Agency:

www.pmr-arla.gc.ca/english/pdf/pnotes/ants-e.pdf